



Pump Up the Curriculum With Pumpkins!

Jump into pumpkin facts and pumpkin lore. Try pumpkin science, pumpkin math, pumpkin writing ...

Take a pumpkin to school. It's October's largest, "orange-est," and most visible fruit!

Pumpkins! Fruits? Yep! Now there's a fact your students might not know. The perfect place to start your study of pumpkins! (See more [pumpkin facts](#) below.)

Pumpkins are harvested in early fall, and echo the changing colors of the leaves. Since pumpkins are used as a decoration for Halloween, students see them everywhere! They're readily available, inexpensive materials for some wonderful classroom hands-on experiences!

So why not plan a theme around pumpkins? Or spice up your curriculum with a one-time pumpkin infusion -- no matter what subject area or grade level you teach!

PUMPKIN ACTIVITIES

Language arts, reading, and writing. Activities are available by the pumpkin patch full! "Pick" one of these!

- Place one or more pumpkins in view of the students. Ask them to contribute a list of words to describe the pumpkin. Students can write similes and metaphors using words that describe pumpkins.
- Invite students to make their own word search puzzles out of the descriptive adjectives they came up with in the previous activity.
- Invite students to write a paragraph describing a jack-o'-lantern face. When finished, they can exchange assignments and draw the face as described in the paragraph they are handed.

Pumpkin math. Pumpkins are a natural for math. They come in various sizes and contain many seeds. Compare pumpkins by weight and circumference.

- Students can pick up three pumpkins, one at a time, and predict the weights: heaviest, middle, and lightest. Invite them to record their pumpkin weight predictions. Then weigh the pumpkins. Do the predictions match the weights? Encourage students to create a chart to organize their information.
- Measure the circumference of the same three pumpkins. Does the heaviest pumpkin have the largest circumference? Students can weigh and measure pumpkins at home, record the results and contribute to a group chart of pumpkin weights and measurements. What conclusions can students draw about the relationship between weight and circumference?
- Find the relationship between the size of a pumpkin and the number of ribs. In how many ways can this relationship be expressed?
- Predict which pumpkin (the largest? the smallest?) will have more seeds. Hollow out those two pumpkins and count the seeds of each. Predict how many seeds the middle-sized pumpkin will have. Students can find out how close their predictions are.
- Challenge younger students to find a way to divide the pumpkin seeds so each class member has the same number.

Science. Children in grades K-2 will enjoy the read-aloud story, *Mousekin's Golden House*, by Edna Miller. After reading the story, place a hollowed pumpkin outside in a protected place and observe the changes weekly. Keep a journal of children's observations.

Social studies. This is the perfect time for students to explore some of the history behind pumpkins.

- Students can research where pumpkins originated. When were they first raised? By whom?
- What is a *jack-o'-lantern*? Where did the term come from? What are other meanings of the term *jack-o'-lantern*?

Food and cooking. M-m-m-m good! Find handy Internet references for a number of pumpkins recipes. Check out [Preserving Sunflower and Pumpkin Seeds and Popcorn](#). The highly-nutritious pumpkin seeds contain zinc and other trace minerals important to the eyes. Or, if it's something sweet that you're looking for, visit [Pumpkin Recipes](#).

Creative thinking. Look for new uses for pumpkins. Cinderella's pumpkin was used as a coach. But a creative New Englander once used a giant pumpkin as a motorboat. (See "Cinderella, Eat Your Heart Out" *Yankee magazine*, October 1997, p. 17). Challenge your

class to brainstorm new and unusual uses for pumpkins! For more about the New England fall, you might check out [Yankee magazine's home page](#).

THE FINAL WORD: MORE FACTS ABOUT PUMPKINS

And here's how October's big fruit grows:

1. Leafy vines grow from pumpkin seeds.
2. Yellow-orange flowers bloom on the pumpkin vine, then wither.
3. The flowers' ovaries (at the base of the flower) swell and become tiny green pumpkins.
4. The pumpkins grow larger and change color and...
5. About four months after planting, they're ready to harvest.

And a few more facts worth knowing ...

- Pumpkins can vary in color from white to yellow to orange.
- Pumpkins contain vitamin A and potassium.
- Pumpkins are an ingredient in pies, breads, soups, and other foods.
- Pumpkin seeds can be roasted for a snack.
- Pumpkins are used as feed for some farm animals.

Article by Anne Guignon
Education World®
Copyright © 2002 Education World

Related Resources

ADDITIONAL PUMPKIN RESOURCES

- *Beyond the Bean Seed: Gardening Activities for Grades K-6*, by Nancy Allen Jurenka and Rosanne J. Blass; Teacher Ideas Press, 195 pages (1996). This book connects gardening with literacy and children's literature.
- "A Harvest of Learning for a Multiage Class," by Penelle Chase, *Educational Leadership*, September 1995. A plan for pumpkin growing and marketing, including "real work and problem solving."
- Maine Agricultural Foods: Project SEED, by Peter Beaulieu and Pat Ossenfort. From the Maine Center for Educational Services (1994), this paper describes a Maine project for

students in grades 4-12. "The goal is to increase student awareness of how the foods they eat are planted, harvested and processed." Pumpkins are one of the foods.

- "Halloween High Jinks," by Doreen Andrews and others, *Learning*, October 1992. Presents a collection of fall and Halloween activities for elementary students, including pumpkin poetry.
- "The Great Pumpkin," by Maureen Johnson and Judith Stone, *Science and Children*, September 1989. Includes pumpkin investigations using measuring and cooking.

Related Sites

ANOTHER PUMPKIN SITE ON THE INTERNET

- [World Class Giant Pumpkins](#) A whole page of links to the world of giant pumpkins: giant pumpkin organizations, statistics, growing techniques, festivals, and more!

Copyright 2003 Education World

Last Updated: 10/07/2003